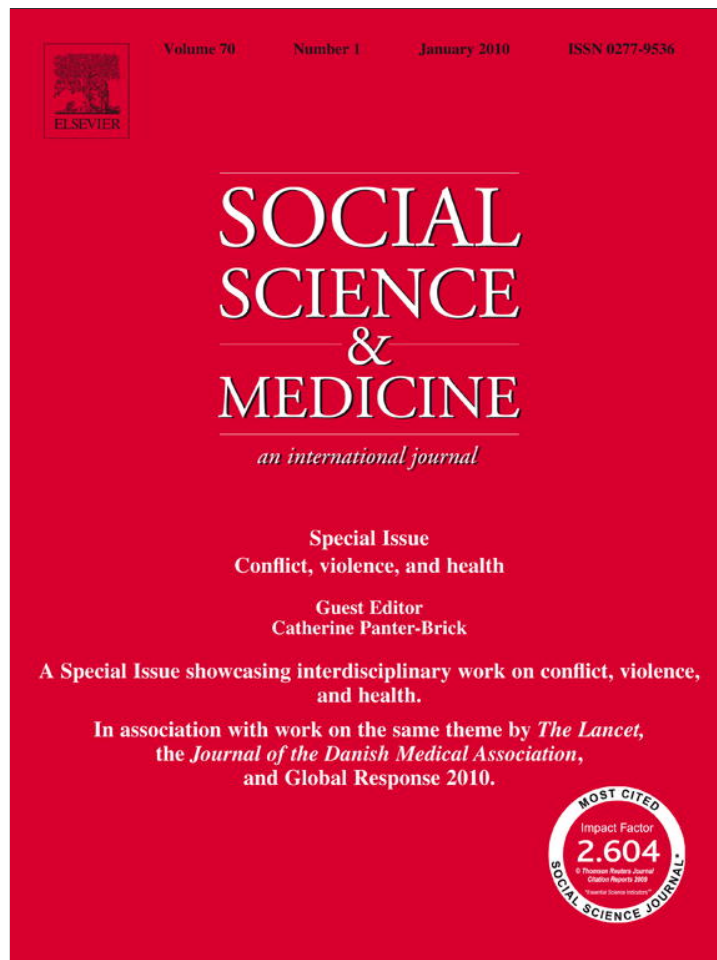


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journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/socscimedRuptures, rights, and repair: The political economy of trauma in Haiti[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the unintended consequences of humanitarian and development interventions in Haiti implemented to facilitate its postconflict transition following the period of military rule between 1991 and 1994. International and national governmental and nongovernmental initiatives to provide redress and healing to victims of human rights abuses from this period inadvertently contributed to the growth of a *political economy of trauma*. I argue that state-sponsored and non-state interventions aimed at truth seeking, acknowledging past ruptures, and reparations have intersected with the politics of local communities in ways that contribute to the commoditization of suffering in the political economy of trauma. The experience of a woman whose bodily integrity and personal sovereignty were violated by members of Haiti's terror apparatus demonstrates the presence of a *terror economy*. My witnessing of her interactions with the international and national humanitarian and development aid organizations that assisted her in the aftermath of violation revealed the contours of the *compassion economy*.

It is the compassion economy that is the particular focus of this article. I evaluate whether rendering visible or audible the individual and collective suffering of the past truly aid processes of social reconstruction, democratization, and peace building, especially in states plagued with ongoing social, political, and economic insecurity. I argue that the forms of citizenship that these interventions engender are rarely permanent, especially in fragile or failed states, and may exacerbate the societal cleavages that gave rise to conflict.

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Introduction

In local, national, and international contexts, “truth-telling” has become an integral part of the cultures and practices of human rights, postconflict reconstruction, and transitional justice. To mobilize political recognition for the subjects of these interventions, it has become essential to document the “truth” of suffering and to determine authentic victim status. The determination of victim status requires the use of rationalized, bureaucratic techniques of assessment to authenticate, categorize, and legitimize particular forms of suffering. What is at stake is classifying and remaking suffering according to criteria that will permit redress, whether through medical, legal, political, or other practices.

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Such processes are complex and fraught with ambiguity (Boltanski, 1999; Rieff, 2002; Terry, 2002). Documenting and categorizing violent acts in societies that are undergoing conflict is an especially complex task. In contexts where the state apparatus attacks its own citizens it may be difficult to distinguish between political and criminal motives for violence. State-sponsored violence may also challenge assumptions of a separation between political and domestic spheres, and between public and private actions (Pateman, 1988). Historically, these classifications have been critical to pursuits of justice as each evokes domains of law that traditionally have been separate: international human rights law, and domestic civil and criminal law.

As nations undertake the “transition” from violent political conflict to peace, testimonies of injury figure prominently in therapeutic processes of individual, communal, national, and international history making, and in efforts to promote psychosocial rehabilitation and reparations (Hayner, 2001; Johnston & Slyomovics, 2009; Ross, 2003; Slyomovics, 2005; Wilson, 2001). Public testimonies about past trauma have become essential components of legal and quasi-legal judicial practices aimed at national reconciliation, such as truth commissions, tribunals, and trials. Such practices are also evidence of a “liberalizing” trend in government (Teitel, 2000), indicating to the international

community a state's intent to establish "rule of law," "democracy," a "culture of human rights," and "human security." Demonstrating progress toward achieving such states is frequently a condition of international aid and a marker of its human rights performance.

In her study of human rights practices in Morocco, Susan Slyomovics argues that the "performance of human rights" occurs on several levels. At the international and national levels, performance refers to a state's perceived ability to protect and promote human rights. Human rights advocates and organizations employ a management model that tabulates "social, political, economic, and institutional indicators that permit quantifying and comparing human rights performance transnationally and regionally" (Slyomovics, 2005: 7–8). "Performance" also signifies how human rights are enacted or expressed within a variety of sociocultural contexts within a nation. Some forms of human rights performances include "funerals, eulogies, mock trials, vigils and sit-ins, political rallies, conferences, public testimony and witnessing, storytelling, poetry recitals, and letter-writing campaigns" (Slyomovics, 2005: 9). Another kind of human rights enactment occurs at the level of intersubjective experience. Individuals assess their success or failure to endure psychic and physical violations of their human rights, often before an audience of listeners with whom the individual has an ethical relationship of obligation (Slyomovics, 2005: 11).

While this layered concept of performance is derived from human rights practices, similar forms of diagnostic, authentication, and therapeutic enactments are employed in projects that craft "citizens" from biological sufferers (Nguyen, 2005; Rose & Novas, 2005). But does rendering visible or audible the individual and collective suffering of the past truly aid processes of postconflict reconstruction? Does public testimony about past social ruptures create new forms of citizenship from "states of injury" (Brown, 1995), whether biological (Petryna, 2002; Rose & Novas, 2005), traumatic (James, 2004), or therapeutic (Nguyen, 2005)? Can such processes promote justice and the "rule of law," or might they exacerbate the societal cleavages that gave rise to conflict – especially in states plagued with ongoing social, political, and economic insecurity?

This paper examines the performance and circulation of narratives of suffering in what I have termed the *political economy of trauma* (James, 2004). The political economy of trauma emerged in Haiti as one of the unintended consequences of interventions to repair the sequelae of human rights violations perpetrated against victims of human rights abuses from the 1991 to 1994 coup period. In fragile societies like Haiti, interaction with the international and national humanitarian and development aid apparatus has been one means by which Haitian *viktim* have sought "recognition" (Fraser, 1995; Povinelli, 2002; Taylor, 1994), healing, and repair of their many losses.

I focus on the experience of one woman with whom I associated over the course of four years. Her story reveals how the violation of bodily integrity and personal sovereignty by members of Haiti's terror apparatus combined political and economic intents, thereby indicating the presence of a *terror economy*. Through my therapeutic and advocacy work with this woman and others like her in Haiti, and in witnessing their interactions with the international and national humanitarian and development aid organizations that assisted them in the aftermath of violation, I became aware of the existence of a *compassion economy* within the political economy of trauma. As terror and compassion economies intersected, state-sponsored and non-state interventions aimed at truth seeking, acknowledging past ruptures, and reparations contributed to the commoditization of suffering in "local moral worlds" (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1991).

Ensekirite and intervention

Haiti is no stranger to intervention, either military or "humanitarian." Since its independence from France in 1804, the first black republic has been subordinate to the international community both politically and economically (Farmer, 1994). The nation has undergone U.S. military occupation (1915–1934), repressive military dictatorship under the hereditary Duvalier regime (1957–1986), foreign economic intervention through structural adjustment and stabilization measures, and is dependent on foreign development aid. Since the 1986 ouster of dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier, *ensekirite* has been the term Haitians use to describe the state of episodic emergency and instability that is sparked by political and criminal violence.

During the 1986–1990 post-dictatorship period, there was violent protest by pro-democracy activists who sought to *dechouke* (uproot) the repressive Duvalier apparatus from Haiti's soil and retributive retaliation by the Duvalierist armed forces. On December 16, 1990, the pro-democracy sector was successful in electing to the presidency former priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide. However, on September 30, 1991, the Haitian military staged a coup d'état that ousted the first democratically elected president. The coup apparatus targeted the poor pro-democracy activists with impunity until October 15, 1994, when the U.S.-led Multinational Force restored Aristide to power with UN authorization through Operation Uphold Democracy. For the international interveners seeking to transform Haiti's society and political economy, October 15, 1994 marked the onset of the "postconflict period."

In the postconflict period humanitarian and development interveners initiated a number of governmental and nongovernmental transition initiatives (James, in press). Nonetheless, Haiti continues to manifest social, political, and economic instability, and periods of escalating violence known as *ensekirite* (Haitian Creole for 'insecurity'). *Ensekirite* is an ontological, pernicious, and powerful state of "routinized ruptures" that plagues Haiti's efforts to consolidate its democracy and create a climate of peace and security (James, 2008). *Ensekirite* currently describes waves of seemingly random political and criminal violence that render *all* in Haiti vulnerable, but especially *viktim* (pronounced "veek-teem") – self-named "victims" of politically motivated violence who were targets of the *de facto* regime between 1991 and 1994.

Between 1991 and 1994, insecurity escalated to egregious levels. Many Haitians affirm that the styles of violence employed during the coup years permanently shifted the boundaries of what was morally thinkable (or customarily practiced) in political and interpersonal contexts. Arbitrary arrest and detention of activists, disappearances, torture, rape, gang rape, forced incest, and murder, were tools used to terrorize the poor pro-democracy sector. Such acts accompanied extortion, theft, and destruction of property, and the growth of a black market as components of a terror economy. Since the 1994 restoration of democracy, *viktim* have not easily found security and justice. The Haitian National Police has faced ongoing charges of corruption amidst a longstanding climate of impunity. *Viktim* are frequently subject to the sovereign power of civilian gangs that police poor enclave communities like many of those in which I worked.

All of these conditions contribute to the nation's current status as the "poorest country in the Western Hemisphere" and as a so-called "fragile" or "failed" state. Although population statistics are frequently unreliable, during the time of my research between 1995 and 2000, the World Development Report 2000/2001 listed the nation as a "low income" country (170th out of 206 economies), with a GNP of only US\$460 per capita (World Bank, 2001). Sixty-three percent of the population lacked access to safe water, fifty-five percent lacked access to health services, and seventy-five

percent lacked access to basic sanitation. Adult illiteracy rates were at least fifty-five percent. At least twenty-eight percent of children under age five were below normal weight. Infant mortality rates were nearly sixty-four per one thousand live births (UNDP, 2000).

Such dire conditions have not improved much in recent years. The CIA World Factbook 2008 estimated life expectancy at slightly more than fifty-eight years for women and fifty-five years for men. The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is nearly six percent for the entire population of Haiti, with some regions with much higher percentages. At least eighty percent of the population lives in poverty and fifty-six percent in abject poverty. Haiti's current external debt is US\$1.3 billion and unemployment is currently estimated at nearly seventy percent (CIA, 2008). It is under conditions such as these that the politics of *ensekirite* and aid intersected in local communities, producing conflicts over humanitarian and development assistance that exacerbated existing social strife.

Ensekirite, advocacy, ethnography, and ethics

The insidious presence of *ensekirite* underpinned many of the ethical challenges that I observed and experienced during the course of my ethnographic fieldwork. From 1995 until 2000, I spent more than 27 months following *viktım* in their quests for peace, justice, and indemnities for their complex losses. Between 1996 and 2000, I worked with *viktım* at a women's clinic that I call Chanm Fanm (the Women's Room).¹ Chanm Fanm was located in Martissant, a slum of Port-au-Prince controlled by armed gangs who battled corrupt police officers for control over narcotics and other contraband flowing through the area. At the time I was an active practitioner of the Trager Approach[®], a method of movement education and psychophysical integration that has been effective for individuals suffering with chronic pain.² In 1996, members of the women's rights organizations that co-founded the clinic invited me to volunteer my services to rape survivors from the coup years. I expressed interest in formal study of the interrelationships between culture, gender, and history, and trauma and sexual violence, subjects that I would subsequently pursue through doctoral research in medical anthropology and cross-cultural mental health at Harvard University and Harvard Medical School. The co-founders of the clinic granted me permission to interview clients and staff for my initial ethnographic research. At the time of my research, Harvard University did not require institutional review board approvals for anthropologists; therefore, I negotiated permission to conduct research, participate in activities, as well as to interview staff, clients, patients, or "beneficiaries," with each institution or organization in which I worked.

When I arrived in Haiti later that same year, I was introduced to women *viktım* at seminars on Women's Rights under Haitian Law. At these seminars, I demonstrated the Trager method with staff members of the organization volunteering as clients, and explained my research project to those in attendance. At the conclusion of the seminars I began working with women *viktım* at the clinic and also interviewed them about their experiences of political violence and its long-term effects on their lives. I also became aware of the challenges *viktım* faced navigating the growing number of international, national, and community rehabilitation initiatives for victims of violence that formed a subset of

the overall aid apparatus – one that Haitian social critic Saveur Pierre Étienne (1997) has described as an "invasion."

My initial research generated questions regarding the efficacy over time of therapeutic initiatives aimed at *viktım*, as well as questions about how emotional distress manifests in Haitian culture. From 1998 to 1999, I learned about Haitian "idioms of distress" by observing therapeutic encounters between the clinical staff and patients of the Mars/Kline Center for Neurology and Psychiatry at the State University Medical Hospital, a teaching facility in which psychiatric residents, psychiatric nurses, and social workers received training. Alongside this period of study, from 1997 until 2000, I observed the human rights and political development practices at the America's Development Foundation Human Rights Fund (HRF), including participation in therapy groups for *viktım* in its Victim Assistance and Rehabilitation Program, a USAID funded project. I received permission to review archival materials and dossiers representing over 2500 beneficiaries with the understanding that the identities of clients would be disguised in my work. In addition to these activities, I conducted life histories with *viktım* using a Haitian Creole version of the Clinician Administered PTSD-Scale (CAPS), for which I received training at the Boston Veterans Administration National Center for PTSD and the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research. Research subjects consented to test the instrument and were compensated for their participation in the amount of H\$20 for a 90 min interview. Wherever possible, staff meetings, interviews, and conversations were recorded on audiotape.

The research activities described above were components of a broader project that analyzed Haiti's postconflict transition (James, in press). As has been noted by anthropologists of critically engaged ethnographic practices (Fortun, 2001; Marcus, 1998; Schepher-Hughes, 1995; Speed, 2006), the anthropologist may simultaneously hold numerous, and sometimes conflicting, positions as advocate, historian, and friend of her research subjects, among others. As an ethnographer of African American descent, I was aware of my privilege as an American citizen, while empathizing with the ways that U.S. politics and policies toward Haitians have historically been racially and ethnically discriminatory (Farmer, 1992, 1994). Over the years that I conducted this research, the relationships between my clients, associates, and friends transformed as each of us changed capacities or our personal circumstances improved or worsened.

Negotiating shifts in identity, history, power, and discourse over time can create ethical dilemmas for both the ethnographer and her research subjects. As anthropologist George E. Marcus writes:

In conducting multi-sited research, one finds oneself with all sorts of cross-cutting and contradictory personal commitments. These conflicts are resolved, perhaps ambivalently, not by refuge in being a detached anthropological scholar, but in being a sort of ethnographer-activist, renegotiating identities in different sites as one learns more about a slice of the world system. (1998: 98)

Those with whom anthropologists work – our "informants," "research subjects," "colleagues," "fellow activists," and "friends" – emphasize certain components of our identities and practices versus others according to context, as well as for instrumental purposes. At times my "clients" approached me as a physical therapist, and at others as a student in need of protection who was naïve in the ways of the community and the politics of the country. Occasionally, *viktım* pressured me to act to help relieve their immiseration by asking for financial support, for visas to the U.S., or to assist in gaining access to other domestic and international actors and organizations working in the aid apparatus. Conversely, providers of care for *viktım* in my three main institutional fieldsites

¹ All personal names in this article are pseudonyms except for public figures. In some cases, identifying details have been slightly altered to protect the subjects described. Names of organizations or institutions have not been disguised unless indicated by quotation marks.

² See www.trager.com.

expressed their frustrations and challenges working with these vulnerable populations whose needs went beyond the prescription of antidepressants and who continually grappled with the *ensekirite* that lay beyond the walls of the clinic, psychiatric hospital, or development organization. Staff of these institutions and others expressed their irritation with other humanitarian actors in the aid apparatus and with the restrictions that working within administrative bureaucracies with limited finances placed on their capacity to “do good.” It was difficult to negotiate the competing demands for assistance for both providers and receivers of aid, and to reconcile the sometimes disparate and competing approaches aimed at rehabilitating *viktim* that were grounded in discourses of women’s rights, human rights, economic development, psychiatry, and even religion.

Just as the position of the ethnographer may be multiple and complex, those whose lives we document are also multifaceted. Multi-sited research may compound ethical issues of observation and representation when the observer witnesses how research subjects choose to emphasize certain aspects of their own identities and experience in different settings over others in order to meet particular needs, and control the flows of information presented to individuals and institutions acting in humanitarian capacities. “Truth” becomes something partial, flexible, and contextual, rather than absolute. Of course, unequal distributions of power affect these engagements.

In his work documenting how the Argentine “dirty war” was remembered, Antonius Robben (1995) described processes of manipulation and “seduction” as intrinsic components of studying conflict settings, in which the politics of the truth are matters of life and death. In being perceived as the “harbingers of history” (1995: 97) through our retelling of their stories, or perhaps, as the gatekeepers to humanitarian aid and other forms of assistance, ethnographic informants attempt to persuade the witness or listener to adopt their point of view or position as a matter of political and moral restoration, as well as for survival. But in order for performative utterances of suffering to be efficacious, they must be conveyed in a recognizable, persuasive manner that can generate empathy, compassion, and action in both near and distant spectators (Boltanski, 1999), especially ones who suffer from “compassion fatigue” (Moeller, 1999).

Thus, “performances of human rights” became means by which “victims of human rights abuses” framed or represented their suffering according criteria that (in theory) might generate particular forms of political recognition and redress. Achieving recognition of suffering as distinct through public and private testimonies of injury was crucial, especially when the majority of a population may be suffering from the “violences of everyday life” (Kleinman, 2000). In situations of chronic insecurity, where it is frequently more difficult to classify acts of violence without ambiguity, obtaining recognition of suffering as “exceptional” might generate material and symbolic forms of capital that were essential for survival. In such contexts, trauma narratives were not simply oral documents of the past. They involved public presentations of the self (Goffman, 1959) in the service of individual and collective projects of rehabilitation and restoration.

During the period of military rule and after the restoration of democracy in 1994, international governmental and nongovernmental actors and institutions like the UN International Civilian Mission, Doctors of the World, Physicians for Human Rights, the Aristide Foundation for Democracy, the Fondation Connaissance et Liberté, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, and numerous others promoted health and human rights, justice, democracy, and reparations for Haiti’s *viktim*. The processes whereby *viktim* were recognized as legitimate sufferers involved what I call *technologies of trauma*. I observed how the professional languages of law,

medicine, psychiatry, human rights, feminism, and others, translated, abstracted, and commodified victims’ embodied and narrated suffering into what I call *trauma portfolios* (James, 2004) – the aggregate of affidavits, photos, medical records, receipts, letters of support, and other media compiled in dossiers to verify a victim’s experience. The individuals and institutions that compiled these trauma portfolios circulated them as commodities, “fetishes,” or currencies that represented the legitimacy and accountability of the victim’s suffering to the Haitian state and to international governmental and nongovernmental actors assessing Haiti’s human rights performance. Trauma portfolios were also circulated to demonstrate the competence and accountability of the interveners and their institutions to their own donors and stakeholders (James, in press). Thus, technologies of trauma are also mechanisms of “audit cultures” (Strathern, 2000) in which diversified trauma portfolios are the “indicators” that represent the aid givers’ authenticity and competence. The processes comprise a professional transformation of suffering (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1991) that has fed a growing humanitarian market.

The following narratives demonstrate how these processes manifested over time, and how the politics of truth became intertwined with efforts to repair the societal ruptures generated by *ensekirite* in Haiti.

The politics of truth: rape and rights

In the early 1990s, there was tremendous global attention focused on the reports of “ethnic cleansing” in the former Yugoslavia and the forcible impregnation of Bosnian Muslim women by Serbian men – the use of rape as a method of genocide (Stiglmayer, 1994; Zarkov, 2001).³ While similar reports of the politically motivated use of gendered and sexualized violence in Haiti were being disseminated publicly by the broad humanitarian and development assemblage that had begun to form in response to the crisis, the Haitian case did not initially draw the same global indignation. United States government officials, and domestic and international opponents of the Aristide government, contested many of the initial reports as fabrications until a series of scandals occurred in 1994 that raised questions about the United States government’s commitment to global human rights and democracy.

In the aftermath of the scandals, USAID sponsored the Human Rights Fund project at the America’s Development Foundation to provide free humanitarian assistance, medical care, legal counseling, housing assistance, stipends, and other forms of support to recognized victims of human rights abuses. At the same time, Haitian and international development, human rights, and women’s rights organizations that had worked together to disseminate information about the plight of coup victims – and in particular, women who were targeted with politically motivated rape – collaborated to establish Chanm Fanm in Martissant, a highly populated poor neighborhood just outside the Port-au-Prince capital. I circulated between Chanm Fanm, the Mars/Kline Psychiatric Center, and the Human Rights Fund, tracking how *viktim* negotiated the multiple local, national, and international institutions that targeted them for a variety of interventions. It was during this work that I met Liliane Saint-Jean.

³ The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide entered into force January 12, 1951 and defines genocide as “any number of acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

Liliane Saint-Jean, a *madanm sara* (a small scale merchant), was 58 years old in July 1996 when I interviewed and provided manual therapy to her at Chanm Fanm. We had met that summer at one of the workshops on Women's Rights under Haitian Law sponsored by an organization that I call the "Development Research Center" (DRC), many of whose staff were members of the "Haitian Women's Association," one of the women's rights organization that had established Chanm Fanm. Liliane was a tall, commanding woman who spoke forcefully at the women's rights workshop about her determination to fight for women's rights. As she spoke with conviction in the group that had gathered for the residential retreat at the DRC's offices in the Delmas section of Port-au-Prince, her fortitude and emotional strength were apparent. A couple of weeks later, however, when we met in private at Chanm Fanm, Liliane revealed the physical, psychological, and spiritual pain that she suffered following a gang rape that occurred at the hands of the military regime on February 4, 1994.

In the small room of the clinic that I used to provide therapy to my clients I began the intake process before we began the table work, a process that ordinarily elicits a narrative of physical complaints and their effect on movement in daily life. Liliane explained that she had pain in her bones, problems with her head, and a mass that had accumulated underneath a stab wound in her back that hurt continually. I asked, "Who stabbed you?" She then shared the story of her suffering in the quiet of the room, while the bustle of daily life at the clinic and the sounds of the neighborhood provided ambient noise in the background. "Zenglendo," she said, referring to the gangs of civilians that began terrorizing urban areas like Martissant during the coup years:

The stuff during the coup d'état ... I suffered a lot. I had to sleep in the woods, I had a lot of problems ... my child ... my child had a child out in the brush. During the period of the coup d'état we received a lot of shocks. I was in hiding. Here is why I was a target. There was a brigade (a neighborhood watch group) in a quarter of the zone – I had to cook food, provide drinks, coffee, rum.

I asked for clarification, "I would like to know when the violence began. Why were you in hiding? What was the date?" I could have been more patient. I would learn over time that trauma narratives have a pace of their own, are often non-linear, and are sometimes full of gaps and pauses. In response to my request, Liliane immediately shifted to a narrative format that I would eventually recognize, one that had been shaped by the practice of legal depositions requiring testimonies to have a rational, linear, teleological format:

On the fourth of February 1994, they came and entered my house. They beat me and they beat my husband. They raped me and they raped my daughter. They put a gun against my son's ear and told him to lay face down on the ground. They beat my husband and beat him until they saw that he peed blood. He couldn't move or do anything.

The zone in which she lived was occupied by the military especially during the time that preceded president Aristide's return. This February attack was one of many that occurred as part of a campaign against heavily pro-democracy areas.

Liliane next returned to the story of why she thought that the perpetrators had come. This time I did not interrupt in order to allow her to tell her narrative as she willed.

I had a little business. They came and asked me to change American money. I said I didn't have any. They said, I was preventing the military from entering into the quarter – I kept the people from sleeping (by supporting the night watch). What

made me do that was that I wanted to save a lot of people and I truly saved a lot. When they would beat the drums you would give them food – each night you'd make a party for them ... give them this, give them that ... until you never slept at all ... but you'd receive beatings ... they raped me, they took my niece who helped me in life, who helped me. When I escaped (after the rape) they came after me. In the morning I was so ashamed. When others in the neighborhood ridiculed me [because of having been raped], I went into hiding. I went to the provinces for three months. When I came back this organization was documenting what had happened. They came and got me. If it wasn't for that I could have died already. An older person like me. Then I was 56. A lot of people came into my house – seven or more. They came and raped my child. All of them raped her. They took my husband. They dumped his head in a bucket of water. When the little girl saw this they took her by the neck and ... took off with her. I have never found her until today.

Liliane concluded her story of suffering with a plaintive lament that was characteristic of the hundreds of testimonies that I received, heard, witnessed, or "consumed," during the time that I lived in Haiti: "When I see this country I don't understand it still. When Aristide was here, when Aristide was here, we had a little breather, but now things are getting worse. I want Americans to do something for us. It was you that led Aristide here to take power again. Although he's not in power any longer, he has to open his eyes to see what's happening to us ... in the end we in this country aren't doing well."

President Aristide had tried to assess what had happened to the poor pro-democracy activists during the coup years upon his restoration to power by instituting the National Commission for Truth and Justice (CNVJ). This temporary institution was largely recognized as flawed and inadequate to the task of representing the truth of the period between September 30, 1991 and October 15, 1994, the period mandated for its investigation (Hayner, 2001). While the Commission field investigators collected thousands of stories throughout Haiti with support from the UN International Civilian Mission and other international and national NGOs, it jettisoned much of the original regional data (Ball & Spierer, 2000: 27). The final report presented a chronology of events between 1991 and 1994 using statistics to represent such events with limited analysis (CNVJ, 1997). Liliane's true name is nonetheless included in the final text of the Commission report, but neither she nor her family has received justice from the Haitian state.

In recognition of the inadequacies of the National Commission, especially in addressing forms of everyday violence that women faced whether in periods of conflict or periods of relative calm, a number of Haitian women's rights organization collaborated to organize an international tribunal that assessed the general problem of violence against women in Haiti. The International Tribunal Against Violence Toward Haitian Women received financial and technical support from Oxfam and other Canadian development organizations. Representatives from UNIFEM, the UN/OAS International Civilian Mission, USAID, Haitian and international human rights groups, international human rights medical missions, Haitian victims organizations, the Ministry of Justice, and other Haitian government agencies, attended the four-day event that was broadcast on radio stations throughout the country. I was present as an international guest and representative of the Human Rights Fund. A panel of international women activists, lawyers, and others performed the role of "judges" to hear cases demonstrating the vulnerability of Haitian women to domestic, political and sexual violence, and economic exploitation. The slogan for the symposium – "*N'ap wete baboukèt la*" (We're taking the muzzle off) – signaled an intention to open up a space where women could

move from silence and shame to speak about the persecution that they'd endured on a day-to-day basis in Haiti. Explicit within the introduction to the Tribunal was the acknowledgment that while the Haitian state seeks political recognition of its human rights performance in the international realm through the ratification of international human rights conventions, its domestic practices of justice are sorely lacking, especially for women.

Women testified behind black sheeting which enclosed an area of the conference room in order to protect the identities of the "victims." The majority of these speakers were poor. After each woman spoke, she was questioned by the judges about the details of her presentation in order for them to render a judgment at the conclusion of the two days of hearings. To some extent hearing the disembodied voices of women reveal the horrors of rape, gang rape, or daily humiliation and physical abuse from behind the black cloth was disconcerting to my ears, even having worked with many *viktim* in face-to-face encounters. In my discussions with *viktim* at its conclusion, however, many felt empowered by their participation in the event, which had been broadcast nationally on the radio and recognized publicly by state representatives as a contribution toward the processes of justice. The Tribunal was considered successful in highlighting the everyday violences with which Haitian women contend using an institutional format that most often addresses violations of civil and political rights, rather than economic, cultural, and social rights, or structural inequalities, domestic violence, and the ongoing vulnerability of gendered populations.

Despite these successes, the structure of the Tribunal, the performances of suffering, and the elision of some of the complexities of violence (and its representation) concern me. Although the identities of many "plaintiffs" were kept anonymous and were protected by black sheeting behind which they spoke in the hotel conference room, I was surprised to recognize the voices of some of the women whom I knew from the Martissant clinic who testified about their own experiences, or on behalf of others. Sylvie Saint-Fleur, a leader of a victims' advocacy group, had been working with me to document human rights abuses in the zone and was also a client of mine at Chanm Fanm. She spoke on behalf of her daughter, Natasha, who is deaf and mute and had been gang-raped by four men in Martissant. She continued to suffer a variety of health problems as a result of the rape and the family had never found justice because of the difficulty of pursuing rape cases in the Haitian judicial system.

The context surrounding Natasha's case was more complicated than presented in the Tribunal. The perpetrators were known members of the Martissant neighborhood who were part of a gang that had risen to power during the coup years. The mother of one perpetrator made financial restitution to Sylvie in the amount of H\$800 to resolve the transgression within the local moral community. Nevertheless, Sylvie's did not discuss local efforts to find justice and reparations for interpersonal crime in her presentation of her daughter's story. In the context of the tribunal the recounting of Natasha's violation was a means by which Sylvie gained recognition as an advocate within the community of *viktim*, even as she revealed the terrible vulnerability of women in poor urban enclaves in general, and of the disabled in Haiti, specifically.

The question of the selectivity of the truths of public testimony and the uses of trauma narratives is highlighted further by another example. While the Tribunal was a collective effort sponsored by many women's and victims' organizations, it also appeared as a showcase for one Haitian women's rights group in particular. One of the directors of this organization interrupted the proceedings and asked for a moment of silence in order to report a crisis that was unfolding as we participated. We were told that a young

thirteen-year-old woman had been living with her mother who was unfortunately unable to care for all of her children. At some point her mother gave her daughter to live with another man as a *restavèk* – a status of near servitude in which many young children fall when their families are unable to care for them – and the young girl was impregnated by him. She was raped not long before the Tribunal and the perpetrator was in prison, but we were told that the baby had died inside her. The women's organization was assisting her to receive care at the General Hospital in downtown Port-au-Prince and its leader informed the Tribunal's participants that we would receive postings throughout the day on the girl's progress. Later in the day, a second update about the young girl's condition interrupted a woman's testimony on her experience of domestic violence. We were told that the fetus had been removed from the young girl, but the situation was one of life or death. After this interruption, the testimonies, judges' responses, and general proceedings continued, and eventually, we were told that the young woman had survived.

On one level presenting the case of the thirteen-year-old girl as the crisis unfolded highlighted the desperation of women caught in everyday situations of exploitation. The drama of each interjection increased the already heightened emotion and indignation among the participants. Nevertheless, the presentation was also an appropriation of suffering intended to demonstrate the organization's commitment to the struggle for women's rights in front of an audience of its members – as well as current and potential donors in the international governmental and nongovernmental domain. Indeed, the circulation of wealth in the humanitarian assistance apparatus was one of the factors at stake. The capacity to demonstrate an institution's accountability and competence through the vehicle of persuasive performances of violation was a means by which "local" organizations sustained transnational aid flows and developed new international humanitarian markets in the political economy of trauma. But such aid did not always "trickle down" equally to all organizations.

At the conclusion of the Tribunal one woman I knew from my work at the Human Rights Fund lamented that while her organization had been the first women victims group that formed during the coup years, it had made the least progress in terms of its sustainability. Its members were predominantly non-literate, poor, and lacked access to the international donors that other national feminist organizations with middle and upper class women members had achieved with their international connections. She affirmed, however: "They always call us when they need us to testify about our suffering in front of others." She complained that these organizations did not share the funds acquired from their performances of suffering. A prominent member of a competing multi-class feminist organization echoed this perception of the disparity of access to resources. She complained that in the initial planning of the Tribunal and the solicitation of funds from Oxfam, her organization had been invited to the meeting but was subsequently excluded. Her group still participated in the event and drafted recommendations for the judges to consider that articulated what must be done to change Haitian law and society to improve women's rights and justice for all. In my discussions with her after the Tribunal a sense of frustration with the process still lingered.

The occasion of the Tribunal was a critical event that would also have a profound impact on my research in Haiti as it reinvigorated my relationship with the Martissant women with whom I had worked in 1996. I reconnected with Liliane and other members of the Haitian Women's Association and Development Research Center's support groups for rape survivors. We agreed to meet at Chanm Fanm a few days later so that I could learn how their lives had been since our last meeting the previous year. I also hoped to

facilitate their access to the Human Rights Fund Victim Assistance and Rehabilitation Program.

From an initial meeting at the clinic, the group climbed the mountain to Liliane's home in Martissant. She lived in a squatter settlement that was scarred in July 2006 by a massacre of more than twenty men, women, and children who were caught in the crossfire of rival gangs. As we progressed up the mountain the women invited select other neighborhood residents to join us. Upon arriving at Liliane's home, the meeting quickly became a formal one of the women testifying in turn with me acting as a witness – something for which I had been unprepared. Many women whom I had not yet met took the opportunity to provide me with testimony about their experiences of hardship, violence, and traumatic suffering. To my surprise, I received yet another trauma narrative from Liliane. Her story was most troubling as she had been the victim of criminal violence in the year since we had worked together at Chann Fanm.

Liliane avowed before the assemblage of women that earlier in the year she had borrowed money from a lending house in downtown Port-au-Prince, to restart her business. When she left the moneylender, who was essentially a loan shark, there were men waiting for her who knew she had just received some money. Liliane asserted:

They followed me toward the “Bicentennial” road where there is a hideout where they kidnap the poor who've just bought things. Five men came on motorcycles and took me down by the sea where there are all kinds of foul things. They took me and beat me when they saw I didn't want to give my sack. They cut me ... cut out my teeth. My head swelled completely and I was there for three days. No one knew where I was. Finally, someone saw me and helped me.

Liliane showed me the gaps in her mouth where her teeth should have been. She then stated that Sylvie Saint-Fleur, who rented a room from her, and other women comrades had helped her to the hospital following her discovery. But eventually the owner of the credit agency sent a warrant for her arrest in order to pay what she'd borrowed. He said she must pay or they would put her in prison. The individuals who came with the order to pay hit her in the mouth because she wouldn't give the money back. As a witness and listener to this public traumatic narrative, I was shocked and saddened by the ongoing dangers that these women and their families faced while simply trying to survive and support their families, especially given the ongoing insecurity that they faced in their neighborhood. I responded with pledges to assist the group with their efforts to find stability and security and they were able to become beneficiaries of the Human Rights Fund's Rehabilitation Program.

Two years after hearing Liliane's second story of attack, theft, and extortion, I learned that the story was false from some of the women who were present at the time. In the shadow of the International Tribunal Against Violence Toward Haitian Women, the story had been constructed and performed for me with the complicity of the women participants. The performance of this public trauma narrative mirrored that of testimonies provided during the Tribunal, the previous Haitian Women's Association victim's support groups, and other quasi-legal or therapeutic settings that solicited stories of suffering from victims in the course of providing them with social, medical, or judicial services. Regardless of its truth, the performance's purpose, although never explicitly stated, was to elicit compassion, understanding, and intervention using what Kristeva (1982) has described as the power of horror or abjection. Another purpose was to use the vehicle of a fictional “critical situation” (Giddens, 1984) to return the gaze of humanitarian interveners like myself toward conditions of unrelenting misery and the realities of *ensekirite*.

Liliane's second story of traumatic vulnerability represented an archetype of the experiences of danger, threat, economic vulnerability, and gendered insecurity in Haiti. Her performance of the truth in this case resembles the contested stories of the Guatemalan activist Rigoberta Menchú, who claimed to speak for all victims of human rights violations (Nelson, 2001; Stoll, 1999). Liliane's testimony, when witnessed by an audience of local women, gained her social recognition while being convincing to me as an example of the intersubjective experience of *ensekirite*. To my knowledge, Liliane never repeated this second story, not even in the therapy group for *viktim* in which we both participated at the Human Rights Fund in the fall of 1998.

Many aspects of the concept of the performance of human rights influenced both of Liliane's testimonies of suffering as recounted in the clinic and in public space. Her public and private displays of victimization and grief, both on her own and others' behalf, intersected with international assessments of Haiti's human rights performance, national projects of truth and accountability, and local efforts to advocate for victims of human rights abuses during the course of Haiti's postconflict transition. The translation of existential pain into multiple forms – statements for legal affidavits, testifying before witnesses, therapeutic communication, and others – was a type of labor to “package” suffering for multiple consumers, both in Haiti and abroad. Such packaging also corrals or channels the incomprehensibility of suffering into a form that is manageable and that can be recounted and accounted by others within economies of compassion that are governed by formal or informal assessments. At the most cynical, such performances were exchanges or transactions that could be commodified. But performances of suffering also emerged during the course of the intersubjective sharing of pain, in public and private legal, quasi-legal, and clinical contexts, and were not solely dramatizations intended to garner economic, political, and symbolic capital.

Conclusion

The processes narrated in this article are evidence of the growth of the political economy of trauma, misery, and truth, in Haiti and across the globe. As the governmental and nongovernmental aid apparatus promotes nation-building, capacity building, the rule of law, democracy, and human rights in so-called transitional societies, an unintended consequence may be the reinforcement of existing social inequalities, and the creation of new ones, through the processes of selective recognition that these practices engender. Because such forms of recognition are intermittent and unstable in states of insecurity, notions of citizenship that arise from these biopolitics of identity are impermanent or fleeting and may engender economies in which suffering is commodified as a component of the social life of aid.

False stories of injury represent the power of the trauma portfolio in cultures of humanitarian and development aid, especially when these domains are governed by grant and audit cycles. Using technologies of trauma, both institutions and individuals authenticate and circulate portfolios of suffering to demonstrate their competence in promoting rights, justice, and reparations. Fabricated trauma portfolios indicate the power inequalities between aid givers and receivers. International and national humanitarian and development aid assemblages are frequently impermanent, accountable to their own donors and stakeholders outside the “local” realm, and may not maintain a permanent gaze upon the suffering of aid receivers because of finite resources, especially for those who suffer under conditions of chronic insecurity. Counterfeit trauma portfolios emerge as products of economies in which commoditized suffering has become a currency. While their provenance and authenticity remain salient, counterfeit portfolios

remain valuable as long as there is sufficient demand for trauma narratives in the humanitarian market.

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